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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000784

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: REACTION TO HAMAS VISIT LARGELY NEGATIVE

REF: ANKARA 765

(U) Classified by DCM Nancy McEldowney, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Although Turkey's ruling AK party spinmeisters are trying to put a positive veneer on the February 16 HAMAS visit to Ankara, they concede the visit produced no concrete result. Opposition leaders and even some AKP MPs have expressed great dismay over the visit. Mainstream Turkish media and opposition parties are critical of the handling and timing of the visit; Islamist media give the visit positive coverage. End Summary.

Despite No Result, AKP Leader Says Visit Positive

¶2. (C) Ruling AKP MP and vice chair for political and legal affairs Dengir Firat, who sat in on FM Gul's meeting and continued with HAMAS for an hour after Gul left, claimed that this was the first time anyone had explained the international community's demands to HAMAS. Firat claimed that only Turkey can play this unique role.

¶3. (C) Firat portrayed the visit as a success. Conceding there had been "no concrete result," listening to the Turkish side had created "questions" in the minds of the HAMAS delegation. Firat claimed the visit had changed HAMAS's tone, a change he asserted was reflected in their press statement after the meeting.

Many Others, Even in AKP, See Visit as Negative

¶4. (C) Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal predicted the visit would hurt relations with the U.S. and EU, and would call into question Turkey's stance on terrorism. Motherland Party (ANAP) leader Mumcu criticized the poor preparation, calling the visit a "mess" and saying it hurt Turkey's credibility. Mehmet Ali Bayyar, President Demirel's former foreign policy advisor, expressed exasperation to us at the disorganized way in which the visit unfolded. He called the abrupt announcement that PM Erdogan would not meet with HAMAS "an embarrassment," which made the GOT look "like a bull in a china shop."

¶5. (C) Even some AKP MPs have privately told us that they were upset by the visit. AKP MP and Foreign Affairs

committee chair Mehmet Dulger said he was "astonished and puzzled" by the visit; AKP MP Vahit Erdem told us the visit was "inconsistent with Turkey's policies in the region." PM advisor Egemen Bagis also expressed dismay to us over the visit, "even though I have to defend it in public."

HAMAS Press Statement Emphasizes Turkey's "Support"

16. (U) After meeting with Gul and Firat, the HAMAS delegation made a moderate press statement which did not reject Israel's right to exist or advocate violence, praised the talks as positive, and promised to "evaluate" Turkish "recommendations." The statement said HAMAS had sought the support of Turkish officials and "we have received from our authorized friends here the same support we received from brotherly Arab and Muslim countries."

Media Reaction

17. (U) Mainstream media commentary criticized the handling and timing of the visit, noting Israeli anger. Mass circulation Hurriyet editor Ertugrul Ozkok called it "one of the most pointless and ill-timed steps in diplomatic history"; mass circulation Milliyet's headline read "Stab-in-the-Back Diplomacy." Islamist media gave the visit positive coverage. Islamist and pro-AKP government Yeni Safak claimed Turkey had "taken the lead" in Middle East policy; Islamist Milli Gazete's banner headline read "Welcome, Noble Guest." Some media accounts claimed PM Erdogan decided against meeting the HAMAS delegation due to U.S. pressure.

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